

BREAKING GROUND

COUNTING BLESSINGS



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AND COLLEGE STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES

T E N N E S S E E
C O U N C I L



DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

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	<i>Cover photo of Evan Shouse by John Shouse</i>

Corrections: On page 2 of the Annual Arts Issue (BG #44, October 2008), we misspelled a photographer's name: Taylor Reese should be Taylor Reece; on page 16, the young woman in the photograph was identified incorrectly: pictured with Rev. Patricia Pickett is Christa Baskette. *Breaking Ground* regrets the errors.

CONTACT INFORMATION



This free publication is produced six times a year by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development and Kent Communications Group. Subscription requests, change of address, and submissions for possible publication should be directed to: Breaking Ground, Council on Developmental Disabilities, 404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 130, Nashville, TN 37243. phone: 615-532-6615.

E-MAIL: breakingground@vanderbilt.edu.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities Grant Number 1-03999-1-0. Authorization Number 339371, July 2001. 5,600 copies. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.46 per copy.

COUNTING BLESSINGS

BY JOHN SHOUSE

Our son is Evan Shouse. As parents of and advocates for kids with disabilities, it's easy to become philosophical and go on and on with lofty reasons about why we place such value on "inclusive education" in natural school settings for our kids. Most of the reasons that form the base of our argument are valid and include such things as:

Every child, regardless of ability, should be supported to be a successful part of his or her school community;

Kids with disabilities learn best when their models are "typical" peers;

Every student, regardless of ability or "label", needs to learn to eventually become a part of the "real world" that includes people of all kinds, with all levels of abilities; and

"Typical" kids may benefit just as much (or even more?) from inclusion as students with disabilities.

However, I want to share with you something my wife, Janet, and I received from school recently. It was something that made us stop and count our blessings. And, frankly, something that came with no small measure of tears.

Some context is in order. Evan is 12 years old and has very little functional language. He can make requests for things he wants and also has learned to say "No" quite well when asked to do something he's not all that excited about. But if you ask him open-ended questions—like, "Evan how was your day?" or "Evan, what's your most favorite thing to do?"—it's very unlikely you'll get much response without SIGNIFICANT prompting. He loves movies, trains, swords and lots of physical activity (swinging, swimming, horseback riding, climbing, etc.). Evan loves to "Google" stuff. Like many kids with autism, he has a phenomenal memory for those things that interest him.

Evan's last two "special education" resource teachers have been amongst the most amazing people we've met on this journey with autism. The progress he's made under their guidance has been nothing short of phenomenal. Ms. Jenny and Ms. Francine have loved Evan unconditionally and they have worked to create school environments that have allowed him to flourish. We've had some

pretty good "Gen Ed" teachers as well. As you can see from the cover photo, Evan has a simply amazing and contagious smile and people just seem to be drawn to him, EXCEPT when he's having a bad day.

If he's having a bad day, Evan might bite, pinch or lash out. He might bolt and run from the situation that's causing him stress. These episodes are usually short-lived, but they CAN be quite intense and EVERYONE who's around him on a regular basis is likely to experience "both sides of Evan". This, of course, includes his teachers and his classmates. I'm sure that, in many ways, Evan remains an enigma to them.

Evan finished up this school year as a sixth grader at Grassland Middle School in Williamson County Schools, where he was on the "Green Team". The team consisted of four classrooms of kids who worked together, transitioned together; went on field trips together, etc. for the duration of the school year. Our district has a philosophy that first and foremost EVERY student, regardless of "label" or abilities, is a member of the school community, that they are best educated in their school of zone, and, to the largest extent possible, supported to be successful in the age-appropriate general education classroom.

Evan does not do grade-level work. But he IS with his "typical peers" for much of the day. These kids see him every day and have

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Photo by Hollye Owen

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learned that they need to expect the unexpected. They've probably never had Evan come up to them and ask them how they are, except in the context of a teacher's or peer's prompting while working on an IEP [Individualized Education Plan] goal. They've mostly never had spontaneous conversations with him about what's cool or about which movies, music or video games they like. They've seldom had him voluntarily initiate much of any kind of interaction with them at all. But they have lived with Evan in their classrooms, right alongside them, idiosyncrasies and all. Some of them have known him since their kindergarten years.

So, the remarkable thing that I want to share with you is something that Evan's General Education homeroom teacher said about him, along with comments from several of the students on the "Green Team". They wrote these comments independently; none of them knew what the others were writing about Evan.

His teacher, Amanda Boone, wrote: "Evan Shouse, you are such an amazing young man. You put a smile on my face every day when I see you. I hope this list is a reminder of how awesome your entire class thinks you are. I am so glad you were a part of the green team this year. I expect great things from you in the future. I can't wait to see!!! Love, Ms. Boone."

As if those wonderful words weren't enough, the student comments followed. "You are the coolest person I know!", "You ROCK!", "You are funny and awesome and I'm glad you were on the green team.", "You

give the best high fives", "You are generous and share!", "You are very helpful with the lights!", "You are awesome and I love hanging out with you!".

As I read those words, the tears flowed. Thirty-seven comments. Each one a powerful affirmation that for our son and, JUST as importantly, for his classmates, inclusion WORKS! Not because of some lofty philosophical principle. But, rather, for the simple reality that, with inclusion, lives are forever changed for the better.

Sometimes it takes the words of a child (or of 37 incredible kids and a remarkable teacher) to make you stop and count your blessings. And to thank God for showing us such love. Janet reminds me sometimes in the morning when I leave the house to make sure I look for evidence of God's love in my life. Some days it is a challenge. Not challenging because He is too small, but because I am...or I simply forget to look. That day it was easy. I don't have a clue if these kids know what a precious gift they have given.

I am so proud to be "daddy" to this amazing little boy, who teaches me more about unconditional love every day than I could ever repay or express. The journey is hard sometimes. Really hard. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. And moments like this are what make life worth living.

John Shouse is past president of the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee and is a graduate of Partners in Policymaking™(2002-03).

Meeting the Challenges of the New High School Requirements

BY JOSEPH FISHER

The 2009-10 school year will bring challenges to all high school students, including those with disabilities. The State Board of Education recently passed new high school graduation requirements that emphasize rigor and relevance, and set higher standards for proficiency and academic performance.

These new requirements will cause administrators, teachers and parents to work together to ensure that students are focused in their area of interest and that they will be successful in completing the requirements to receive a regular high school diploma.

All students will be required to complete 22 units of credit in order to receive a regular diploma. Students with disabilities not receiving a regular diploma will be allowed to receive a transitional certificate or IEP [Individualized Education Plan] certificate. The transitional certificate will be awarded only to a student with a disability who,

for some reason, did not meet all the requirements for a regular diploma at the end of his or her senior year (that is, pass an end of course test, etc.). This is the same as the current "Special Education Diploma". However, students with disabilities may continue to work towards the regular high school diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn 22 years old.

In addition to receiving the 22 units of credit, all students will have to pass nine end-of-course tests. These tests will replace the three Gateway exams now required for graduation.

Challenging times are before us. We all must focus on the individual student and what's best for his or her future. Parents and students will need to be involved now more than ever, and administrators must strengthen their roles by coordinating with staff and the community to ensure the success of all students.

Joseph Fisher is assistant commissioner, Division of Special Education.



MEET TAYLOR KRIEG:

One of Father Ryan's Newest Graduates

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

When Taylor Krieg entered Christ the King school as a kindergartner, her mother, Natalie, just assumed that her daughter would be accepted and welcomed. After all, it was the response afforded her older daughter, Emily, the year before. But Taylor's situation was a little more challenging. Born with Down syndrome, she would become the first student with an intellectual disability to be educated at their local parish school.

"I guess I was naïve, not knowing that it shouldn't necessarily be that way," recalled Natalie Krieg. "I have four children, and I wanted them all to be together—for convenience of course—but I wanted the same for Taylor that I wanted for them: to have that Catholic education, and the socialization and community that goes along with it."

Jump ahead a dozen years. On May 18, 2008, at The Curb Center of Belmont University, Taylor graduated with the Father Ryan senior class. Again she was the first student with an intellectual disability to do so. After a wonderful experience at the grade school level, the Kriegs just saw Father Ryan as the next logical step. "Not knowing what to expect, we kind of went with the same attitude we had at Christ the King, which was, it's common sense," said Ms. Krieg. "Let's work on things here and see what we need to do. Father Ryan was very open and receptive to Taylor. It's worked out extremely well."

Surprisingly, that move from grade school to high school did not require a major undertaking by a transition team. It helped that, in a way, Taylor was bringing her previous school with her. "We were very fortunate with the fact that we had several parents here at Father Ryan that had students that were actually in class from kindergarten through eighth grade with Taylor," Ms. Krieg said. "They were so familiar with her that it was no big deal. Those people shared their experiences, which made it easier for all the teachers."

Throughout her Father Ryan experience, Taylor was 100% included in the general education classrooms, unlike many students with intellectual disabilities in public schools who spend part or, in some cases, all of their days in a segregated classroom. The Kriegs worked closely with the school's administration to choose Taylor's schedule, and each of her teachers modified the curriculum to make it more accessible to Taylor's scholastic abilities. It did take some trial and error, with some classes proving to be too intense for Taylor, or a particular class's make-up of students too overwhelming.

But all in all, a fairly seamless continuation of Taylor's educational career. That's not to say she accomplished it all by herself. Although she didn't have an adult educational assistant Velcroed to her throughout her days, she had, according to mom, "many, many angels over her shoulders and around the corners. Many of them I'll never be able to thank because I don't know about them! Some of these kids that you wouldn't even expect to give anybody the time of day bent over backwards, welcomed her, and became friends with her."

Besides those behind-the-scenes "angels", Taylor had the added advantage of having her older sister, Emily, who knew the Father Ryan

ropes. The summer before starting high school, Emily brought Taylor to the Father Ryan campus several times, showed her all the classrooms and different buildings, and then sent her off on little challenges to make sure Taylor would be able to get to those places on her own. "That was just one of those common sense things that made it work," Ms. Krieg said.

Fortunately, Taylor's successful inclusion in all things Father Ryan did not stop at the end of the school day. In the afternoons and evenings friends call her; she calls friends. They go to school plays and Father Ryan sporting events together. When Taylor participated in the Special Olympics—she excels at swimming, gymnastics and basketball—some of her Father Ryan peers came to cheer her on or to volunteer for the Special Olympics sporting events.

"She probably knows everybody in the whole school and she considers them all her friends," Ms. Krieg said. "At the beginning of her senior year, she told a friend she wanted to be Homecoming Queen. That sweet young lady passed that around to several other people and Taylor was nominated to be on the Homecoming Court. As far as Taylor was concerned, she was the Homecoming Queen!"

Ms. Krieg paints a very rosy picture. However, she readily admits that Taylor's Father Ryan experience included some obstacles and anxieties. Still, she absolutely believed that when Taylor left for school each morning she was heading to a safe and supportive environment. "I don't think the hurdles we had to get over were any different than what I would have expected from any of my other kids," explained Ms. Krieg. "Was I afraid that somebody might mistreat her or say something wrong to her? Well sure. But they've done that to my other kids, too. That's just part of this world and regular life."

And so, Taylor is off on her next step in living a regular life. She leaves Father Ryan with a Certificate of Completion and the family has been meeting with a counselor from the State's Vocational Rehabilitation program in the hopes of entering Taylor in a job training initiative, possibly one at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital called Project Opportunity. "Taylor wants to be a nurse and work at Vanderbilt," Ms. Krieg said. "So our challenge is to get as close to that as we possibly can."

Now that she has accomplished getting Taylor through Christ the King and Father Ryan, Ms. Krieg is hoping to collaborate with others in the Catholic community to create a program for additional students with intellectual disabilities, starting at the grade school level. "I'd love to see this trail that Taylor has set—she's been such a brave little girl—not be in vain," said Ms. Krieg. "I'd love to see it continue with many more children to follow and many more successes."

"And if we just changed one person's feelings about acceptance, then we totally succeeded."

This article originally appeared in the Tennessee Register, the newspaper of the Diocese of Nashville, and is used with permission.

Ned Andrew Solomon is director of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute and Youth Leadership Forum with the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

YLF 2008 BRINGS TOGETHER HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO LEARN AND LAUGH

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

The days started early—too early for some. The nights went on late—but not late enough for others. Such is the nature of the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), a Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities program that brought together 17 high school students with disabilities from across the State, July 7-10, to learn and laugh on the Vanderbilt University campus.

They learned how to speak up for themselves, in small and large group settings. They learned about each other's disabilities and how

to talk about their own. They learned about leadership, resources for college students with disabilities, community service, striving for independence, the services available at Tennessee's Career Centers and how to be a better photographer.

They laughed with each other, and at themselves. They bonded with the counselors too—many of whom were returning YLF graduates from earlier programs. In the evenings, during free time, they played musical instruments, had intense UNO competitions and burned up Rubik's Cubes.

They acted like typical college students, accessing meal plans with their personal debit cards and traveling across the beautiful Vanderbilt grounds like they'd been there countless times before.

The Council had high expectations for its YLF 2008 Student Delegates and was not disappointed. We expect students with disabilities to be thinking about their lives after high school and to make certain their voices are being used, and listened to, when choices are being made that may affect them for years to come.

Join us in congratulating the new YLF graduates.



- ✧ **Michele Adams**, *Spring Hill*
- ✧ **Jacob Arnseth**, *Knoxville*
- ✧ **Ross Conrad**, *Tullahoma*
- ✧ **Garrett Baker**, *Knoxville*
- ✧ **Carrie Dean**, *Paris*
- ✧ **Allyson Edde**, *Nolensville*
- ✧ **Zac Estep**, *Elizabethton*
- ✧ **TeResa Henderson**, *Memphis*
- ✧ **Nick Loftis**, *Monroe*
- ✧ **Carol Jeannette Mackinnon**, *Gatlinburg*
- ✧ **Carolyn Meyer**, *Brentwood*
- ✧ **Zavier Ortiz**, *Cunningham*
- ✧ **Heather Rasmussen**, *Watertown*
- ✧ **David Trimmer**, *Humboldt*
- ✧ **Dustin Trimmer**, *Humboldt*
- ✧ **Kelly Wells**, *Knoxville*
- ✧ **Eleanor Wolfe**, *Knoxville*

To find out more about the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum, contact Ned Andrew Solomon at 615-532-6556, or by e-mail at ned.solomon@state.tn.us. Applications are accepted year round.

Photos by Lynette Swinford, Ned Andrew Solomon and Allison Kemp-Eoff.



Small Beginnings, High Expectations

Photo by Lynette Swinford



BY SYLVIA AND
ELEANOR WOLFE

All eyes of the attractive group of high school students seated around the classroom conference tables were fixed on her face and small frame as she spoke in her slow, gentle voice. "So why am I telling you about my face-blindness? Because it's an example of the barriers that

students with disabilities experience. At our school are many students who have disabilities that are both visible and invisible. But we have something in common; we miss out on real life with students who don't have disabilities."

With that, 17-year-old Eleanor Wolfe, who has autism, began a short presentation to the Leadership Initiative class at Farragut High School in Knox County, in hopes that she would find both support and recruits for her Senior Project, an innovative approach to the Volunteer Tennessee Aspire program. Aspire is a Tennessee Department of Education service-learning program for high schools addressing safe schools issues such as drugs, alcohol and violence. Eleanor proposed to use the Aspire model to address an altogether different issue: the social isolation she and other students with disabilities experience. Unlike all other school programs at Farragut High, Eleanor envisioned a program intentionally diverse with regard to ability.

What made sense to Eleanor and to her mother, Sylvia Wolfe (a 1999 Tennessee Partners in Policymaking™ graduate), was the way Aspire goes about working to change a school's "climate" through student-led projects and activities. This seemed like a good match for the highly success-oriented student body at Farragut High. But Eleanor needed to convince the school administration that such a program was needed. Before meeting with the Leadership Initiative class, she made her pitch to the school principal. His response was favorable but reserved. Her concept would work best as an approved school club, he explained, and must follow the prescribed approval process for new clubs.

Eleanor and her mother now teamed up to tackle the real world bureaucracy on a fast-track: recruiting at least 15 club members and two adult sponsors, gaining the approval of Student Government and the principal, and securing financial support to send all of the new members to the required Aspire leadership training. Eleanor assumed she could recruit students with disabilities and peer tutors, but approaching the Leadership Initiative class was an attempt to bridge the divide and find students who don't have disabilities and have no

experience with ability diversity. To their credit, those students were instantly energized to assist Eleanor in real world matters they were more familiar with than she, including publicity and fundraising.

How had this student with autism—who didn't want to "miss out on real life"—learned about Aspire in the first place? Eleanor was fortunate that her recent experience in Tennessee's Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), a program of the Council on Developmental Disabilities, had increased her self-confidence, helped her better articulate her ideas on advocacy and provided a new set of networking connections. Inspired to address the social climate at Farragut High with regard to ability, Eleanor turned to YLF director Ned Andrew Solomon for ideas or leads.

Ned already was aware that Aspire program director, Melia Arnold, was considering ways to enhance student diversity in Aspire teams and was particularly interested in bringing students with disabilities into the teams, so he forwarded some Aspire information to Eleanor. About to rule out Aspire because its targets are drugs, alcohol and violence, Eleanor, in a creative dialogue, posed her passion for another core value. Melia explained the generic character of the Aspire leadership training and its potential flexibility and encouraged Eleanor to proceed.

Now Eleanor had to move forward to recruit Aspire team members and secure funding on a dauntingly compressed time schedule. Significant red tape lined the path. But Eleanor's inspiration was contagious and she did not give up. Financial support was received from the Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education. As a result, the eight charter members of Farragut High School Aspire Club attended the intense, productive and fun Leadership Training weekend held at Nashville's Joe C. Davis YMCA Camp and Outdoor Center.

Eleanor's unique concept is born.



Photo by Krista Fisher



SEEKING COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL ABILITIES

BY ALICIA CONE, PHD

Over the last four years, a dedicated group of people have come together seeking to increase the opportunities available to students with intellectual disabilities who are exiting the school system. As this group of parents, family members, advocates and professionals from a variety of agencies looked into the options for life after high school for students, it became clear that many students went home with no services or supports. Some went to work, but far fewer than their same age peers. No students with intellectual disabilities in Tennessee went on to a postsecondary educational experience.

Why? It wasn't because these students didn't express a desire to go to college like their siblings and peers without disabilities. That option simply wasn't available to them.

From a national perspective, there is increasing interest in alternative postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and a consortium of interested organizations are collaborating to advance the awareness of a need for postsecondary programs for this group of students. The consortium is undertaking a survey to identify two-year and four-year postsecondary programs that provide exemplary, meaningful support to students with intellectual disabilities.

In addition to amassing valuable information for prospective college students and their families, it is hoped that the survey of existing programs will encourage other postsecondary institutions to increase the services they provide to students with disabilities.

The group that initially came together in Tennessee expanded its membership and became the Tennessee Task Force for Postsecondary Education. It was established to plan and support the development of postsecondary programs on the campuses of Tennessee institutions of higher education. Partners in this initiative include the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee, the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee and The Arc of Williamson County.

The Task Force convened in May, 2007, to gather research, develop the concept and plan a demonstration project for Tennessee. Family members joined representatives from several colleges and

universities in Tennessee, private business, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the Tennessee Board of Regents, and the Tennessee Divisions of Special Education Services, Rehabilitation Services and Mental Retardation Services to support the project. The underlying mission: to oversee the development of college-based programs in Tennessee that empower students with intellectual disabilities by providing course work that develops independent living skills and career opportunities.

Through the work of the Task Force, a call for applications for a postsecondary demonstration project was developed. The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities will fund the project and announced the availability of grant funds for the project in May, 2008. Eligible grant applicants included Tennessee colleges and universities.

For the purposes of this project, the Council followed the definition of intellectual disabilities provided by the Consortium for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. The term Intellectual Disability refers to students with significant learning, cognitive and other intellectual disabilities which affect their ability to access a general education curriculum without a strong system of educational supports and services.

The postsecondary education programs planned and developed under this initiative will target students who have completed secondary education programs in Tennessee. Candidates may have received a secondary school certificate or special diploma. Tennessee students who have received a general high school diploma, passed the Tennessee Gateway exams or passed standard college entrance exams are not eligible for this program.

The Council selected the Vanderbilt University Kennedy Center in Nashville to develop this demonstration project. The demonstration project will include a curriculum designed to provide meaningful continuing education activities for students who have an intellectual disability and will include a substantial career exploration and development component. The project is divided into two phases: a year-long design and planning phase, and a two-year implementation phase. The design phase begins in January, 2009.

Alicia Cone is project research and development coordinator with the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

EARLY INTERVENTION RESOURCES

COMPILED BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

Early intervention
supports and services

for infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays have the potential to increase educational and developmental functioning and to improve the overall functioning of the family unit.

Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS) is a voluntary educational program for families with children ages birth to three years old with disabilities or developmental delays. A program of the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education, and Office of Early Childhood, TEIS links families with supports and services.

Phone: 1-800-852-7157; Web: www.state.tn.us/education/speced/TEIS/

There are 110 early intervention supports and services agencies in Tennessee currently listed in the **Tennessee Disability Pathfinder** database. To view those listings, visit: <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/tnpathfinder>. Click on the icon "Search the Pathfinder Database for TN Services". Select "Early Intervention" in the "Pick the Service" pull-down menu.

The list below is selective. It contains national early intervention resources that may be helpful for families and professionals.

NATIONAL RESOURCES

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) is focused on promoting the social/emotional development and school readiness of young children birth to age five. CSEFEL is a national resource center funded by the Office of Head Start and Child Care Bureau for disseminating research and evidence-based practices to early childhood programs across the country. Web: www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/

The **Division for Early Childhood (DEC)** is one of 17 divisions of the Council for Exceptional Children, a professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, or gifted children. DEC is especially for individuals who work with or on behalf of children with special needs, birth through age eight, and their families. The DEC promotes policies and advances evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities.

Phone: 406-543-0872; Web: <http://dec-sped.org/index.html>

The **Family Village** integrates information, resources and communication opportunities on the Internet for persons with cognitive and other disabilities, for their families and for those who provide them with services and support. The site has a section on early intervention resources.

Web: www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/education/ei.html

The **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** is dedicated to improving the well-being of all young children, with a particular focus on the quality of educational and developmental services for all children from birth through age eight. NAEYC is committed to becoming an increasingly high performing and inclusive organization.

Phone: 800-424-2460; Web: <http://www.naeyc.org/>

The **National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC)** works to strengthen service systems to ensure that children with disabilities (birth through five) and their families receive and benefit from high-quality, culturally appropriate and family-centered supports and services. NECTAC is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. NECTAC serves all 50 states and 10 jurisdictions with an array of services and supports to improve service systems and outcomes for infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children with special needs and their families.

Phone: 919-962-2001; Web: <http://www.nectac.org/>

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) offers a wealth of information on:

disabilities in infants, toddlers, children and youth; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); No Child Left Behind (as it relates to children with disabilities); and research-based information on effective educational practices. The section on "Help for Babies (0-3)" may be particularly useful (www.nichcy.org/babies/Pages/Default.aspx). They also have produced a parent guide, *Finding Help for Young Children with Disabilities (Birth-5)*. Parent Guides are a series developed to address the common questions and concerns of parents who are raising children with disabilities. People who work with parents or children with disabilities will find this series helpful too (<http://old.nichcy.org/pubs/parent/pa2txt.htm>). NICHCY can offer help in English or Spanish. Phone: 800-695-0285; Web: www.nichcy.org/Pages/Home.aspx

Wrightslaw is a Web site resource for parents, educators, advocates and attorneys interested in learning more about special education law, education law and advocacy for children with disabilities. The site has a section on early intervention services for children, and answers questions such as: "What is early intervention? What does it consist of? How does my child qualify? What should I do if I am not happy with evaluations, programs or services? What is Part C? Is it the same as Part B but for younger children? How does an IFSP differ from an IEP?" Web: www.wrightslaw.com/info/ei.index.htm

Zero to Three works to support the healthy development and well-being of infants, toddlers and their families. Zero to Three is a national

nonprofit multidisciplinary organization that advances its mission by informing, educating and supporting adults who influence the lives of infants and toddlers. Their site has resources for parents and for professionals and a section on public policy. Phone 800-899-4301; Web: www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer

BOOKS

Early Intervention: The Essential Readings

Edited by Maurice Abraham Feldman

This book covers current theory, research and practice in early intervention, bringing together the best recent papers by prominent researchers in the field. Authors include: Michael Guralnick, Edward Zigler, Craig Ramey, David Olds, Zolinda Stoneman and Carl Dunst. For information about ordering, visit: www.blackwellpublishing.com

The Early Intervention Dictionary: A Multidisciplinary Guide to Terminology

By Jeanine G. Coleman

This dictionary defines more than 4,000 medical, therapeutic and educational terms commonly used by the many different professionals involved in the early intervention field. It is an excellent reference to help families and professionals successfully collaborate and understand each other's terminology. It is also useful to anyone looking for clear definitions of words related to the care and development of young children in general. For information about ordering, visit: www.woodbinehouse.com/main.asp_Q_product_id_E_1-890627-63-1

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

GOVERNOR APPOINTS NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

In July and August, Governor Bredesen named three new appointments to the Council on Developmental Disabilities and reappointed four members. In his announcement, the Governor said, "We depend on the commitment of citizens like these men and women...and I appreciate their willingness to serve the state of Tennessee."

Breaking Ground is pleased to introduce them to you.



Sheri Grigsby lives in La Vergne and is an At-Large representative on the Council. Ms. Grigsby is a recent Partners in Policymaking™ graduate (2006-07), is a member of the National Federation of the Blind and currently is a VISTA volunteer with the Tennessee Technology Access Project.

"[Partners] has taught me invaluable skills in dealing with my legislators, my community and society at large. I learned constructive ways to advocate not just for persons with a specific disability, but towards a more open, respectful and inclusive society for all members of that community. I feel the time spent helped me find my voice and not be afraid to stand for change, whether that be in policies or small community issues.

"As a mother, a wife and a person with a disability, I am in constant search of more inclusive neighborhoods...[as a Council member] I would strive to keep empowering my community, my legislators, as well as my state to work harder towards the goals of all people with or without disabilities."



Sheila Moore, from Brentwood, is the mother of two children, Matthew, 19, and Katie, 14. Matthew has Down syndrome. Ms. Moore has served as an advocate for her son since the day he was born. She was one of three parents who gave birth to the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee

and has been the executive director of this nonprofit organization for nine years. In addition to representing the Mid-Cumberland Development District on the Council, Ms. Moore serves on numerous local and national committees and boards working for the good of people with disabilities. She is recognized as a leader in creating and implementing programs to benefit children and adults with Down syndrome.

"Being a parent and active in the disability community I know the issues parents face as their children become adults. I hope I can bring my experience to the Council and we can work passionately to bring about positive changes in adult services."



Tommy Lee Kidd, who lives in Lawrenceburg, will represent the South Central Development District on the Council. According to Mr. Kidd, "On July 16th, 2000, my life forever changed. The Good Lord blessed my wife, Lesa-Ruthy, and me with a beautiful little girl, Abigail. Abigail has Down syndrome...It is because of Abigail that my wife and I truly have a passion for individuals with disabilities."

Mr. Kidd is employed by the Local Government Corporation (LGC), a not-for-profit computer software and hardware company.

Mr. Kidd says, "My goal as a...Council Member is to use my abilities to promote policies and encourage inclusion in all aspects of life for individuals with disabilities."

Reappointed to the Council were **John Piver** of Johnson City, representing the First Tennessee Development District; **Stephanie Brewer Cook** of Knoxville, representing the East Tennessee Development District; **Katherine A.T. Watson** of Sale Creek, representing the Southeast Development District; and **Angela Hazlehurst** of Jackson, representing the Southwest Development District. Mss. Cook and Hazlehurst also are members of the Council's Executive Committee.



LEGAL AID SOCIETY TAKES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION CASES FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

“Tameka” is seven years old, in kindergarten, and reads below the kindergarten level. She has failed kindergarten three times. Her mother, who herself was in special education classes throughout school and cannot read now, wants something better for her daughter. Her Mother, “Ms. S”, asked the school to evaluate Tameka for special education. The school refused. Ms. S didn’t know that she had any legal rights, but knew that something was very wrong and that she did not want her daughter to go through what she had herself gone through, due to not learning while in school. She also noticed that Tameka had lost all interest in school and her self-esteem was suffering. She was referred to Legal Aid Society’s new special education project, which determined that she had legal rights that could be enforced.

BY LINDA NARROW MCLEMORE

Tameka’s story is a tragic but typical example of what happens to many children with disabilities in Metropolitan Nashville’s Public Schools (MNPS). In a recent audit of MNPS by the Department of Education, it was discovered that MNPS, contrary to what federal law requires, segregates many students in special education from their more typically learning peers and that teachers are not adequately trained to work with students who have disabilities.

Based upon a long known history of the state of special education in MNPS, Legal Aid Society was determined to seek funding to represent children in getting the services that they need in order to learn and grow up to be as productive as possible as adults. Starting in January, 2008, Legal Aid Society secured a grant from an anonymous donor to launch this new initiative.

Generally, any child who is struggling in school and whose family has income below 200% of the federal poverty level (for example, \$2,333 per month for a family of two and \$3,533 for a family of four) is likely to be an appropriate referral. This may include many scenarios, such as children who are having academic or behavior problems in school but who are not getting special education testing or services; children in special education with inappropriate goals or ones that are not being enforced; children under six years old who need but are not getting special education; children 16 and older who are not being prepared for adult independence; children not being included, to the maximum extent possible, in the typical classrooms; children not being provided necessary accommodations; as well as children being punished for behaviors caused by the child’s disability.

Legal Aid Society’s mission is to enforce, advance and defend the legal rights of low-income and vulnerable families in order to secure for them the basic necessities of life. It is our explicit mission to serve the most financially disadvantaged, those for whom hiring a private attorney is impossible.

Legal Aid Society is taking a multi-pronged approach to special education cases. In some situations, it is enough to educate the applicant about his rights under the law and to provide self-help advice, telling him to

call us back if self-help action is not successful. We have an excellent educational guide, “What You Need To Know About Special Education”, written in plain English and outlining most special education rights, which Legal Aid Society can send to you or which can be downloaded from our Web site, www.las.org (under “self help booklets” and then “family problem” selection). We place high value on educating parents and caretakers as we recognize that they will always remain the child’s most important advocate. Legal Aid Society also will provide representation in appropriate cases at IEP [Individualized Education Plan] meetings and in due process hearings

Finally, Legal Aid Society works in a variety of non-criminal areas. Two areas that often relate to children in special education are access to health care, both eligibility and denial of medical services, and representation in disability cases. It is through our holistic intake process that a trained staff person will determine whether an applicant may need a lawyer to assess not only special education needs, but also possible TennCare, disability, domestic violence, debt issues, tax problems and a host of other legal issues.

This is an effort that can be successful only with community support and dedication to serving Nashville’s most disadvantaged children. We ask for your help and ideas, and we invite you to call us or make referrals to us. We are happy to talk to or train any group, parent or agency staff about the project or about a special education topic.

To contact us about a child in MNPS from a low-income family needing help regarding special education, the child’s parent or guardian can call Legal Aid Society’s main number, 615-244-6610. Please identify that the call is related to special education. The caller’s information will be placed on our intake list and the call will be returned on that day or the following day. Our intake staff will ask questions about financial eligibility for our free legal representation and specific questions about the child’s situation. The application then will be referred to an attorney who will contact the applicant about what Legal Aid Society may be able to do to assist the child.

Linda Narrow McLemore is an attorney with Legal Aid Society.

Project LINK is Transitioning into the Secondary Transition Project

BY LORIA RICHARDSON

The Arc of Tennessee is excited to announce a new program: The Secondary Transition Project. Funded under an agreement with the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education, the staff for this initiative comes from the former LINK (Leaders In Education Networking with Kids) Project of The Arc of Tennessee (a joint project of the Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Special Education), and includes Treva Maitland and Loria Richardson, both parents of young men involved in secondary transition right now.

LINK worked for years to assist families and school systems in learning to collaborate more effectively. In the end, most of these groups became focused on secondary transition issues. Many realized that the goal of molding a productive member of society is what we're all working towards, for all our children. It was a natural evolution to grow into this project, and we look forward to continuing to work with families, students and educators across Tennessee to help make the secondary transition process smoother.

The Secondary Transition Project endeavors to:

- Increase communication between organizations that provide information, services and supports to families about secondary transition;
- Create the Tennessee Secondary Transition Manual for Families;
- Train and help families and students understand the basics of secondary transition;
- Make information, training, and supports available on the Internet;
- Share our Secondary Transition Overview brochure with families and students;
- Develop a group of Secondary Transition parent mentors willing to help other parents;
- Serve as a Secondary Transition source of information to families, students and educators.

We will provide information, training and supports to help families, students and educators become knowledgeable about the secondary transition process, and to help them see the possibilities for adult life. We will do this by connecting them with resources in local communities, across the State, the nation and on the Internet. Our ultimate hope is to

assist families in supporting their young adults as they transition into adulthood, into quality lives of their own design.

Secondary transition is the process that begins when a student is 14 or younger, at least in Tennessee. At that point, the Individualized Education Plan

(IEP) becomes about the independent adult, whom the IEP Team has been striving to educate and prepare for life. When the process begins, it becomes apparent what all these IEP Meetings have been about—molding students into happy, productive members of society.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 Secondary Transition (summarized) contains a coordinated set of activities for a child with an IEP that:

- Is results oriented—focused on improving the functional academic achievement of a student with an IEP, so that s/he can smoothly move from school to being an adult, including more education or vocational training, employment, (appropriate) adult services, independent living and community participation;
- Is based on the individual child's strengths, wants, and interests; and
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and adult living goals, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Transition Planning is about preparing to be an adult and includes deciding what high school courses to take, learning experiences like job training, and other life choices, like where to live, work and play in the community. The IEP team, which typically includes the family and student, makes this plan. When preparing for Secondary Transition IEP Team Meetings, parents should remember to:

- Attend all IEP Team Meetings;
- Talk with your child's special education teacher before meetings about your concerns. They have a great deal of information, such as secondary transition possibilities and opportunities at school, and appropriate adult service agencies and the application process;
- Get together your child's personal documents, including Social Security card, State identification or driver's license, and the most recent evaluation report and IEP in your child's special education file;
- Help your child understand his or her strengths and wants, and find ways to express them;
- Find out about diploma types and their requirements and discuss them with your young adult; and
- Learn about admission requirements for postsecondary institution(s) your child may be considering.

When a young adult reaches 18 years old, she becomes her own person. Parents are no longer the legal guardians, unless those parents have already taken legal action. For information on Conservatorships, contact The Arc of Tennessee at 615-248-5878.

To learn more about The Arc of Tennessee's Secondary Transition Project, please contact:

Treva Maitland • 731-559-4187 • tmaitland@theartn.org
Loria Richardson • 615-215-2065 • lrichardson@theartn.org

Loria Richardson is project specialist with The Arc of Tennessee and a graduate of Partners in Policymaking (1996-97).



Photo by John Richardson

Left to Right: Jane Winstead, Loria Richardson and Treva Maitland



All photos by David Avery

CAREER EMPLOYMENT AND COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

BY ALAN MUIR

A college sophomore with Asperger's Syndrome from Orlando, Florida, had to make a decision as he was parking his car in the garage of the Hyatt Regency Orlando Airport Hotel. He had to determine if he could overcome his fear of social situations and participate in an event that would open his eyes to career possibilities. It took three round trips from his car to the hotel entrance for him to finally enter.

He was welcomed by friendly people. The student then met an executive of AT&T who disclosed his own hidden disability that made him shy away from other people. The executive reassured the student that his talent in computer programming was wanted by AT&T. The executive related his own story about only wanting "to be left alone to work on computers." He continued, "If that is your talent, we want you to work on computers to help us create 'cool' new simulators that we are building for NASA. We are looking for talented people with the skills needed by AT&T."

The student met several other employers and was not judged by his mannerisms, but by his skills and what he could bring to the workplace. He formed a bond with these employers and created the nucleus of a network that will serve him well upon graduation from college.

The event was FULL ACCESS: COSD Student Summit for Career Exploration held in March, 2008, where 46 students with disabilities from 12 colleges and universities in Florida gathered for two half-days to learn how to prepare to be more competitive in their career employment search. Also attending were representatives of major national employers seeking to recruit college students with disabilities and to network informally with the students. These

employers included AIG, AT&T, the Gap, PepsiCo, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, SunTrust Bank, Wachovia Bank, Wal-Mart Stores and Walt Disney World. Each of these employers is committed to diversity that includes people with disabilities and they were impressed by the students' qualifications. The students represented a cross-section of disability and age and experience. Nearly 40% of the student participants were of a non-traditional college age of 25-60 years old.

The Orlando Summit was the first of a series of events to be conducted around the country. The second FULL ACCESS Summit took place in Nashville on September 21-22 at the Holiday Inn Select Opryland/Airport. For the Nashville event, 25 students with disabilities attended from two- and four-year colleges and universities in six states: Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. Employers included AT&T (sponsor of the Summit), Bridgestone Firestone, SunTrust Bank, Medtronic, Microsoft, PepsiCo/Frito Lay and Wal-Mart Stores.



Why are events like the FULL ACCESS Student Summits necessary? The latest statistics show the unemployment rate of college graduates with disabilities is 33% to 45%, in stark contrast to the 3% unemployment of college graduates without disabilities. There are many reasons for this significant discrepancy in unemployment, including the disconnect between Disability Services and Career Services on college campuses. This gap results in students with disabilities not using the Career Services office and becoming virtually invisible to employers who use Career Services as the sole source to recruit all students. Additionally, the students do not receive the preparation assistance needed to be competitive in the career search, including internships and other work experience that are so important to employers making decisions about which students to hire.

Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD) was founded in 1999 to explore how to bridge that gap between

Disability Services and Career Services and also to bring students and employers closer together. Despite their best efforts, employers rarely see a large number of students with disabilities in a single meeting. Therefore, they are excited to have the opportunity to meet students at the FULL ACCESS Student Summit and students benefit by having the close contact with these employers in an informal and "safe" environment.

Among the skills students learn at FULL ACCESS is what to say if disclosure of a hidden disability becomes necessary in an interview. In Orlando, a young woman had the issue of disclosure fresh on her mind after listening to the conference's keynote speaker, Ollie Cantos. Only her family and the person on her campus responsible for overseeing her academic accommodations knew of her disability—she did not even disclose it to her friends. The speaker, who is blind and the highest ranking Federal Government official with a disability, talked about "disability pride" and the fact that a disability is "not the definition of a person, but simply a characteristic." This moved her to the point that she wants to learn how to disclose in the most appropriate way. She said, "I never felt better to be a person with a disability."

For more information about COSD, please visit www.cosdonline.org or call 865-974-7148.

Alan Muir is director of Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities, a graduate of Partners in Policymaking (1998-99) and a past member of the Council on Developmental Disabilities.





Photo by Ashley Coulter

From left to right, Cecilia Melo-Romie, Chamisa Melton, Tracy Pendergrass, and Whitney Griffin.

PATHFINDER ANNOUNCES NEW STAFF ADDITIONS

New disability resource coordinator, **Tracy Pendergrass**, learned about Pathfinder during a post-graduate internship with the Council on Developmental Disabilities. There she worked on the Fulfill the Promise Campaign, focusing on raising awareness to provide funding for home and community based services for people with developmental disabilities other than intellectual disabilities. Ms. Pendergrass' position is funded by the Tennessee Department of Education. Among other duties, she is responsible for the maintenance of Pathfinder's database and Web site, which contain information about local, state and national resources. Ms. Pendergrass also will maintain Pathfinder's Statewide Disability Calendar and research current issues in the disability community.

Information and referral services coordinator **Whitney Griffin** comes to Pathfinder from the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities. Ms. Griffin is also a former trainee of the Kennedy Center, where she completed her graduate school social work internship. She will work with individuals with disabilities and their families providing assessments, crisis intervention, brief counseling and referral services.

Cecilia Melo-Romie joins Pathfinder staff as the DMRS Hispanic outreach coordinator, a position funded by the Division of Mental Retardation Services. As a native of Chile, Ms. Melo-Romie brings her knowledge and expertise in working with the Latino community to Pathfinder's

Hispanic Outreach Program. Ms. Melo-Romie has collaborated with the City of Franklin, Williamson County Public Library and the Franklin Police and Fire Departments in the development of various community awareness events. She will work to identify families for the DMRS Family Support and Medicaid Waiver Programs. Ms. Melo-Romie also will seek out bilingual service providers to assist families in the community.

Information assistant, **Chamisa Melton**, is the mother of a child with multiple disabilities and a graduate of Partners in Policymaking. She is an advocate and speaker on domestic violence, children witnessing domestic violence and sibling abuse. Ms. Melton has volunteered with Pathfinder and United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee in their efforts to raise awareness about disabilities in the community. She will research current disability topics, update agency information and help callers locate appropriate disability services in their communities.

These individuals join Pathfinder's staff of Carole Moore-Slater, program director; Ashley Coulter, outreach and training coordinator; Claudia Avila-Lopez, statewide Hispanic outreach program coordinator; and Carolina Meyerson, Hispanic outreach case manager. The expanded Pathfinder staff looks forward to using their various areas of expertise to assist families in finding resources in their communities.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

English & Español
(615) 322-8529
(800) 640-4636

TTY/TDD users:
please dial 711 for
free relay service

www.familypathfinder.org

tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu



Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers. Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the **TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** and the **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**.

ACCESS NASHVILLE IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

BY CAROLE MOORE-SLATER

Imagine you have arrived in town on business or vacation

and would like to see the city and eat at a restaurant. You happen to use a wheelchair and need information about restaurants that are accessible. Do you have to call each restaurant manager with a list of questions? Is there parking near the front door for wheelchair users? Are there any steps? Where are they? Do the restrooms have transfer bars? Does the restaurant only offer booth seating? If so, is there room for someone to be seated in the aisle? Often, as you make these phone calls to restaurants, accurate information about accessibility depends on the knowledge base of the person answering the phone.

In 2004, an individual contacted Tennessee Disability Pathfinder for a list of accessible restaurants and hotels in the Nashville area. This information was available only on an informal basis, and this prompted individuals with disabilities and representatives from the business, aging and disability fields to join together to address this need.* From the beginning, Access Nashville has trained unpaid volunteers to gather "accessibility-friendly" information. There is no attempt to assess compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); just to provide useful information to people so that everyone can make informed decisions about where to dine.

In 2007, as the project grew, the emphasis changed to service learning for student volunteers in college classrooms** and has included over 225 students attending Belmont University, Middle Tennessee State University, Vanderbilt University and the University of Tennessee School of Social Work. This training program is popular in the classroom (100% satisfaction rating) and promotes systems change through the disability awareness education of student volunteers, the future policymakers and citizens of our community.

After Access Nashville provides the students with accessibility training, they complete "accessibility-friendly" surveys at designated restaurants in the Nashville area as a course assignment. Based on survey information, restaurants receive a "Wow", "Good", or "Limited" access rating.

As an information-sharing process, Access Nashville educates people throughout the community.

- Consumers learn about local area restaurants: accessibility-friendly information is available at www.accessnashvilleonline.org and at the "Accessible Nashville" page of the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau Web site, www.visitmusiccity.com.
- College students learn about disability and access: as a hands-on service learning project at Vanderbilt University and other local colleges, student volunteers receive disability awareness and accessibility training.



Photo by Carole Moore-Slater

- Restaurant managers learn about disability and access: through their participation with the survey, many restaurant managers and staff learn about accessibility and gain an awareness of disability issues. Access Nashville encourages all restaurants to be accessible and provides special certificates to those restaurants that are "accessibility-friendly". Restaurant managers of restaurants receiving a "Limited Access" rating are offered free training and technical assistance through Access Nashville coalition partners, the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities agreed to be the lead agency to sponsor this project under Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and is part of a nationwide movement to provide accessibility information to the disability community. Of these initiatives, Access Nashville is unique in its philosophy, audience and training component and is a low cost project that can be easily replicated in other communities.** *The Access Nashville Replication Manual: Creating an Accessibility Project in Your Community* provides assistance to nonprofit organizations across the country in developing an economical project to evaluate restaurant accessibility. In addition, this manual provides a general model that can be used and adapted to provide accessibility information for other public facilities. There is no cost for this product. For further information, please contact accessnashville@vanderbilt.edu or call Carole Moore-Slater at Tennessee Disability Pathfinder at 800-640-4636.

*Greater Nashville Regional Council (an Area Agency on Aging and Disability), Brain Injury Association of Tennessee, Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee, Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee, Metro Nashville Government ADA Compliance Division, Nashville Visitors and Convention Bureau, Tennessee Arts Commission, Tennessee Disability Coalition, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee.

**The change toward service learning for college students and the development of replication materials occurred under a grant from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Carole Moore-Slater is director of Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT

Dena Gassner, MSW, director for the **Center for Understanding** in Franklin and a graduate of the 07-08 **Partners in Policymaking** class, was recently appointed as **South East Regional Director** for the **Asperger's Women Association**, an international initiative on issues facing women diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome.

The **Tennessee Department of Education** recently named two new Assistant Commissioners. **Dr. Connie J. Smith** is the new **Assistant Commissioner of Accountability, Teaching and Learning**. **Bruce Opie** is the new **Assistant Commissioner of Legislation and Policy**.

Dr. Smith will now oversee the **Office of Curriculum and Instruction**, in addition to the **Division of Accountability**. Dr. Smith has served in education for over 30 years, first as a special education teacher in Tullahoma, then as a special education supervisor in Wilson County and as a principal in New York City. For the past 15 years, she has worked for the Tennessee Department of Education developing the statewide **School Improvement Planning Process**, transforming the State's accountability system and combining State approval and regional accreditation practices. She has her Baccalaureate and Masters degrees from **Tennessee Tech University**, an EdS degree in Psychology and Special Education from **Vanderbilt University**, and a PhD from **Columbia University** in New York City.

Mr. Opie will oversee all legislative issues for the department in addition to assuming oversight of regulatory functions, including teacher licensure, recruitment and professional development. He also has spent more than 30 years in education, serving as a classroom teacher and administrator in Montgomery County Schools for nine years, during which time he was awarded the **DAR Tennessee History Teacher of the Year**. Mr. Opie joined the Tennessee Department of Education in 1985 and has served as the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, helped to develop the Exemplary Educator program and served as Director of Legislation, acting as a liaison with the **Tennessee General Assembly**. He holds a Masters degree in Education Administration and a Bachelors of

Science from **Austin Peay State University**.

The **Down Syndrome Association of West Tennessee (DSAWT)** in Jackson held its 4th annual Summer camp for children and young adults with Down syndrome. **Camp Imaginarium** is a day camp held during

the month of June at **Westwood Activity Center** in Jackson. Camp Imaginarium offers recreational experiences that foster community development and personal empowerment.

At Camp Imaginarium, campers have a wide variety of activities that combine learning and fun, such as music, drama and visual art, culminating in a musical production for family and friends. The DSAWT would like to thank camp directors **Margaret Dougan** and **Melissa Whitaker**, **Jackson Parks and Recreation**, **West Tennessee Healthcare**, **The Children's Clinic**, and the many private donors who helped make the camp possible. For more information about Camp Imaginarium, contact **Debbie Riffle** at 731-787-7698.

Breaking Ground is sad to report that Partners 05-06 graduate, **Anita Robinson**, passed away in early August. Ms. Robinson was a strong advocate for herself, her family members and countless others in her community. Services were held August 9, 2008, at **Bethlehem Temple** in Memphis.

The **Down Syndrome Association of the Mid-South** congratulates **Carol Greenwald** on being chosen as one of Memphis's "50 Women Who Make a Difference". Ms. Greenwald is a speech language pathologist who works with adults with disabilities, but her career in the disability arena is extensive. She is a board member with **West Tennessee Family Solutions**, former president of **The Arc of Tennessee**, and former board member with the Down Syndrome Association of the Mid-South. Ms. Greenwald was one of four parents who helped to re-start the Down Syndrome Association of the Mid-South in 1998.



Photo by Margaret Dougan

Taylor Johnson & Kevin Riffle



Left to right: Ryan, Brendon and Michele Priddy

Photo by Larry Priddy

Brendon Priddy often asked his mom, when she would race, if he could race too. Mr. Priddy and **Michele Priddy**, current 08-09 Partners participant, raised money to purchase a special stroller and began training for the **Virginia Beach 1/2 Marathon**. On August 31,

Mr. Priddy, his brother **Ryan**, and Ms. Priddy crossed the finish line with 20,000 other runners proving that just because you have a disability, your life doesn't have to be limited—you just have to be a little creative.

Current 08-09 Partners participant, **Tina Cicirello**, was awarded the **2008 Volunteer of the Year** award from the **Brain Injury Association of Tennessee (BIAT)**. In addition to her paid position as the peer mentor program coordinator, Ms. Cicirello volunteered several hours throughout the year to brain injury activities. She also acted as facilitator for the **Disability Law and Advocacy TBI Coalition** meetings, served on the annual BIAT conference committee, and attended several TBI related trainings. **Linda Romans**, a rehabilitation assistant at **Tennessee Rehabilitation Center**, was named the **2008 Professional of the Year** by BIAT. Ms. Romans has worked with survivors of traumatic brain injury for several years and is devoted to improving the lives of survivors.

Former Memphian, Partners 96-97 graduate and long time **ADAPT** member, **Dawn Russell**, had a seat at the Democratic Convention in Denver, Colorado. During the Convention, Ms. Russell worked tirelessly to promote the **Community Choice Act** in every venue.

Partners 04-05 graduate **Kelly Sanders** was recently hired by the **Dickson County Developmental Disabilities** office to be a Direct Support Provider for a young man with a traumatic brain injury.

Carol Westlake, executive director of the **Tennessee Disability Coalition**, recently was recognized by the **American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)** for her commitment to people with disabilities as a national disability rights advocate. Ms. Westlake was honored in Washington, DC, at a special ceremony, which coincided with the 18th anniversary of the signing of the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**.

This past June, **Senator Bob Corker** congratulated **Margaret Doumitt** of Jackson for being a recipient of a **2008 Jefferson Award**. The Jefferson Awards were created 36 years ago to honor people across the nation for their community service. Ms. Doumitt founded the **STAR Center** in Jackson, a facility that provides learning services and developmental training to children and adults with disabilities.

It has been a busy time for Partners 00-01 graduate **Lorri Mabry**. In early October, she was crowned **Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee** at a ceremony at the Jewish Community Center in Nashville. Earlier in the year, she received an Outstanding Volunteer recognition, the **"Don't Give In"** Award, for dedicating her time and energy to the **Tennessee Health Care Campaign**.

Photo by Matt Stafford



Ms. Mabry, who was born with cerebral palsy, will spend the next year as **Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee** making appearances and speeches across the State to educate Tennesseans about the abilities of people with disabilities and their productive contributions to society. Ultimately, Ms. Mabry will represent Tennessee at the **Ms. Wheelchair America Pageant** in July, 2009.

Other winners include **Gabryelle Conklin** of Mt. Juliet, who was crowned **Jr. Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee**, and **Savanna Spencer** of Knoxville, who was crowned **Little Miss Wheelchair Tennessee**. **Ms. Wheelchair Tennessee, Inc.** is a nonprofit organization. For more information on the pageant or to schedule a titleholder for an appearance, please contact **Amy Saffell**, state coordinator, at 615-480-4331 or amysaffell@yahoo.com.

Partners 06-07 graduate **Sheri Grigsby** is currently serving a one-year term as an **AmeriCorps Vista** member with the **Tennessee Technology Access Program (TTAP)** in Nashville. She is working toward an effective collaboration between Vista Members from each of the five contracted regional **Assistive Technology Centers** to promote the expansion of the **Statewide Reutilization Program**.

Ms. Grigsby contacted agencies to participate in a **Statewide Reutilization Conference**, which was held in November, and is now facilitating communication between TTAP, the Reutilization Steering Committee and representatives from agencies who participated in the conference.

High School student **Sarah Harrison** got the royal treatment on the set of the TV game show **Wheel of Fortune** courtesy of the **Make-A-Wish Foundation**. On October 10, Ms. Harrison, her mother Karen, her father Jimmie, and her "mamaw" were flown to California, where they visited **Sony Studios** and **Universal Studios**.

Born with partial trisomy 14q, a disorder caused by an extra chromosome in her genetic makeup, Ms. Harrison was not expected to live past six months. Now she is 17 years old and a freshman at **South Greene High School**.



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JoEllen Fowler, Administrative Assistant

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNCIL, CONTACT THE COUNCIL OFFICE AT Parkway Towers, 404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 130, Nashville, TN 37243-0228
TELEPHONE: 615-532-6615 **TTY:** 615-741-4562 **FAX:** 615-532-6964 **E-MAIL:** tnddc@state.tn.us **WEB:** www.state.tn.us/cdd

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